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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000210

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SUBJECT: TONGA'S PRIME MINISTER ANNOUNCES CABINET SHAKE-UP

Classified By: AMBASSADOR LARRY M. DINGER. SECTIONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (U) This message contains an action request. See paragraph 7.

12. (C) Summary: Tongan PM Fred Sevele announced a major cabinet shake up May 16. Five ministerial portfolios were shifted, three new ministers were appointed, and two former ministers were removed. The most significant change appears to be the removal of the former Deputy Prime Minister, Cecil Cocker. The New Zealand High Commissioner to Tonga told us the shake-up signified a major increase in the powers of the Prime Minister in Tonga. Never before had a PM been allowed to form his own cabinet team. Tonga's Ministry of Foreign Affairs was taken by surprise by the announcement that Cocker will be appointed as Tonga's diplomatic representative in San Francisco, and has asked for U.S. advice. End summary.

Cabinet Shaken and Reshuffled  
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13. (U) The Office of Tonga Prime Minister Fred Sevele announced a major cabinet shake-up late May 16. Several ministers changed portfolios, two ministers were removed, including the current Deputy Prime Minister, and three new ministers were appointed. The new ministers are:

-- Mrs. Ali Taumoepeau, formerly the Crown Solicitor, now Attorney General and Minister of Justice;  
--The Honorable Fineasi Funaki, the People's Representative number two for Ha'apai, now Minister of Tourism; and  
--Mr. Paul Karalus, former manager of the Polynesia Airlines office in Tonga, now Minister of Civil Aviation, Marine and Ports.

The following ministerial appointments were terminated:

--The Honorable Cecil Cocker, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Marine and Ports, Minister of Tourism, and Minister of the Environment. According to the PM Office press release, Cocker will be appointed as Tonga's diplomatic representative in San Francisco.  
--The Honorable Fielakapa, former Minister of Lands, Survey, and Natural Resources. He has been appointed Lord Chamberlain in the Palace Office.

The following changes in ministerial portfolios were announced:

--The Honorable Dr. Viliami Tangi, the Minister of Health, has been named Deputy Prime Minister;  
--The Honorable Tuita, former Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, is now Minister of Lands, Survey and Natural Resources;  
--The Honorable Siaso Taimani 'Aho, former Attorney General

and Minister of Justice, is now Minister of Police, Prisons and Fire Services;  
--The Honorable Tu'ivakano, former Minister of Works, is now Minister of Employment, Youth and Sports;  
--The Honorable Nuku, former Minister of Police, Prisons and Fire Services, is now Minister of Works;  
--The Honorable Peauafi Haukinimi, former Minister of Forests, is now Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Fisheries.

Removal of Cocker is Welcomed  
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14. (C) Tonga was abuzz in rumors about the impending shake-up during our visit to Tonga May 13-16. Several people told us they hoped that Cocker would go, as he is widely viewed as an entrenched and stubborn royalist who tried to block reform at every turn. The appointment of Karulus as Minister of Civil Aviation was also noted as a major change, both because of his background in the aviation industry and because he is an expatriate not native to Tonga.

A Sign of the Growing Powers of the PM?  
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15. (C) New Zealand High Commissioner to Tonga Michael McBride told us the cabinet reshuffle signifies the growing powers of the Prime Minister in Tonga and is an important step forward in political reform. McBride said that no previous Prime Minister had been allowed to appoint his own ministers - the King had final say on each appointment. In contrast, said McBride, Sevele was given free rein by the Crown Prince to put together his own cabinet team when he took the job as Prime Minister. (Comment: Clearly the Palace was consulted on the appointments and gave its

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approval. The press release notes that it is "His Majesty's wish" that these changes take place.)

Tonga's Foreign Ministry Asks U.S. Views on Cocker Appointment  
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16. (C) Va'inga Tone, Tonga's Acting Secretary for Foreign Affairs, told DCM May 17 that MFA was surprised at the announcement that Cocker would be Tonga's diplomatic representative to San Francisco. Tonga already has a Consul General in San Francisco, Mr. Tevita Kolokihakaufisi. Tone said he had been directed by Foreign Minister Tua to seek U.S. views on the appointment of Cocker and gather information on steps Tonga needs to take "to implement His Majesty's decision regarding Mr. Cocker." He wondered if both might be able to serve in San Francisco, at least temporarily, and if agreement for Cocker's appointment is required?

17. (C) Comment and Action request. We believe Cocker's departure from Nuku'alofa is a positive step. We would appreciate any relevant information we can provide to MFA in regard to steps Tonga needs to take to either replace Mr. Kolokihakaufisi with Mr. Cocker or have the two serve concurrently in San Francisco.

DINGER